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### NF92-67 Nutrition and the Athlete: Weight Control for Wrestlers

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## Nutrition and the Athlete *Weight Control for Wrestlers*

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*The American College of Sports Medicine warns that "weight cutting" through a combination of food restriction, fluid deprivation and dehydration can be harmful. Restrictions of food and/or fluid can hinder normal growth and development in young athletes, impair performance, and endanger the wrestler's health. Coaches and trainers must consider the long-term needs of their student athletes.*

The pursuit of weight loss by wrestlers before and during the competitive season is a common but unhealthy practice. A combination of food and fluid restriction as well as induced sweating procedures frequently are used to lose weight. The publication, *Sports Nutrition: A Guide for the Professional Working with Active People*, indicates some of the harmful effects such practices have on the body:

- reduced muscular strength
- decreased endurance
- increased sodium and potassium losses from the body
- lower oxygen delivery to muscles
- reduced heat regulatory function
- lower blood volumes

High school wrestlers report frequent and rapid weight loss-regain cycles in a season. This can result in increased fatigue, anxiety and anger. Athletes are often not able to compete at their best. In extreme cases, death has resulted.

Encouraging weight loss in young athletes who already have a fairly low percent body fat is a problem. The American College of Sports Medicine recommends that male athletes 16 years and younger with a body fat below 7 percent and those over 16 years with a body fat below 5 percent need medical clearance before being allowed to compete.

Another concern about strict weight recommendations for young wrestlers is the potential for interfering in normal growth processes. Male adolescent growth spurts typically occur at the ages of 12 to 16. Many

young male wrestlers have more growing to do. Following extremely low calorie diets to reach an unrealistic weight could hinder growth. The **minimal** caloric needs of high school and college wrestlers range from 1700 to 2500 kilocalories per day depending on size and shape. Under rigorous training, caloric needs may increase by another 1000 kilocalories per day. Wrestlers should not eat less than their minimum daily need.

**Sample food group servings for 3 minimum  
calorie levels (excluding added fat and sugar):**

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	<i>1700 kcal</i>	<i>2200 kcal</i>	<i>2500 kcal</i>
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Bread Group	6	9	10
Vegetable Group	3	4	5
Fruit Group	2	3	4
Milk Group	3	3	3
Meat Group (ounces)	6	6	7

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**Resources**

- Benardot, D. Sports Nutrition: A Guide for the Professional Working With Active People. Chicago, IL: American Dietetic Association. 1993. pp 38-44.
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Hyperthermia and dehydration-related deaths associated with intentional rapid weight loss in three collegiate wrestlers - North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Michigan, November-December 1997. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 47(6):105-107, February 20, 1998.
- Oppliger, R.A., Case, H.S., Horswill, C.A., Landry, G.L., and Shelter, A.C. American College of Sports Medicine. Position stand on weight loss in wrestlers. Med. Sci. Sports Exerc. 28(6):ix-xii, 1996.
- Steen, S.N. and Brownell, K.D. Patterns of weight loss and regain in wrestlers: Has the tradition changed? Med. Sci. Sports Exerc. 22:762-768, 1990.

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